

GATEKEEPERS' GATEKEEPING ROLE TOWARDS UPHOLDING HUMAN RIGHTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE TIMES OF INDIA & THE INDIAN EXPRESS

GOPAL KRUSHNA SAHU¹ & AFAQ AHMAD²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

²Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, news media provides an important platform where people raise different issues of their concern. The issues of the men and women, their rights and atrocities meted out against them, needs to be raised in various forums including the newspapers. This study is aimed at analyzing the newspaper coverage and understanding gatekeeper's gate keeping role towards upholding human rights of the people. To analyze the coverage of the issues relating to human rights, two mainstream national English dailies: The Times of India and The Indian Express were purposively chosen. The systematic random sampling technique was employed to select the contents of the newspapers between 01 January to 30 June 2017. Further, the study examines the existing frames in the news narrative of human rights issues through the frame analysis technique. It was revealed that the newspapers under study provided adequate coverage to human rights issues; but most of the times, the news stories pertaining to human rights were presented in negative frames. There has been a little variance in tonality and resonance of reporting between two newspapers under study. The findings also reveal that there were numerous incidents of human rights violations in the society to which the newspapers under study paid scant attention and it seems that they are not on the news agenda.

KEYWORDS: Human Rights, Content Analysis, Framing, The Times of India, The Indian Express, Gatekeepers, Gatekeeping Role

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INTRODUCTION

India is one of the few places on earth where newspapers still thrive as there is a huge appetite for news in its readers. This buoyancy of print media is a positive sign of progressive atmosphere in comparison to the western press, where newspaper circulations are dwindling day by day. Noble laureate Amartya Sen has commended the historical role of Indian newspapers in exposing hunger-related facts on the ground in extreme cases and, in concert with other democratic institutions, preventing the government from pursuing disastrous policies and thus guaranteeing 'the avoidance of acute starvation and famine' (Sen 1985). Newspapers are one of the most effective avenues for initiating a stimulating discussion on different issues and sensitize the public regarding their social, economic, political, educational, cultural, and religious rights. They shape public opinion. The importance of newspapers cannot be underestimated in addressing the pressing challenges that confront marginalized sections of the society, including Dalits, tribals, women, farmers, workers of the unorganized sectors, etc. The problems and issues so highlighted by the newspapers sow seeds of consciousness among people. However, with the changing national and international circumstances as a result of globalization, a serious threat to human rights has arisen.

One of the ways by which this threat could be met is by bringing human rights to the center stage of public discourse and in this regard, newspapers can play a key role. By considering human rights as a way of life, fundamental changes can be brought about in the eradication of poverty, ignorance, prejudice, and discrimination based on sex, caste, religion and disability.

The news media can inform, educate and enlighten the public on issues and bring notice of the grievances of the people to the government. The priorities of the newspapers strongly influence the priorities of the public. The media agenda leave an indelible mark on the minds of the public. As the press influences the thinking of millions of people in a number of ways, the present paper tries to evaluate the gatekeepers' gatekeeping role in response to human rights violations. In order to understand the role of the press, two of the most prominent and reputed daily newspapers of India, The Times of India and The Indian Express have been purposively chosen for conducting content as well as frame analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sahu and Rao (2013) employed content analysis method to track down the coverage of the Telangana issue in two major English dailies of the then undivided Andhra Pradesh- The Deccan Chronicle and The Times of India. They found that most of the stories covered by both of the newspapers were about the events or statements of the leaders. The authors contended that instead of taking the side of the truth, the newspapers adopted a populist approach not hurting the sentiments of the dominant group in the state. The news stories and their headlines were written very casually without necessary emphasis and adequate background about the issue. The newspapers didn't consider the seriousness of the situation in Telangana. Perhaps the Telangana issue was not on their agenda. This reflects how the news media disconnected itself from the ground realities and losing its credibility over the years. Woodring (2007) has theorized the difference in the relationship between media freedom and governments' respect for human rights, depending on the presence of democratic institutions. He has noted that lack of censorship on media to disseminate information will enable it to act as a watchdog over the government whether it's a democratic country or autocratic regime. The researcher posed questions as to how does an independent media affect governments' respect for human rights? The author argues that the free media can compel the government respect to human rights. Further, most of the autocratic regimes have a repressive response and negative outlook to curb human rights abuses while democratic countries have developed a progressive and positive attitude to uproot human rights violations. McPherson (2012) has touched the psyche of journalists who cover human rights' news. In this paper, the researcher provided an overview of what journalists are trying to do when they cover human rights stories and how their aims and objectives interact with overt influences on journalism, such as economic considerations and political pressures, to produce human rights news. She argues that human rights information must usually be about violation rather than the protection to be considered newsworthy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broader objective of the study is to understand the gatekeeping role of The Times of India and The Indian Express relevant to human rights. Further, the researchers formulated the following specific objectives for closer inspection:

- To measure the coverage of different issues related to human rights in The Times of India and The Indian Express;

- To estimate the coverage of human rights issues separately on the front and inside pages to understand the relative importance given to each category;
- To inspect the news frames hidden in the news stories on the basis of selected frames;
- To make a comparative assessment of The Times of India and The Indian Express to understand the respective gatekeeping role.

RESEARCH METHODS

The researchers analyzed the newspaper contents relevant to human rights by employing the content analysis method. For the purpose two mainstream daily newspapers, The Indian Express and The Times of India were purposively chosen to make a comparative study. The data were extracted through systematic random sampling that spans from 01 January to 30 June 2017. News stories on human rights were selected in a way that was being published in every fourth day covering over a period of six months. Further, the authors identified seven frames –Pragmatic, Prognostic, Victim, Oppressor, Sensational, Media Referential and Media Trial to assess the gatekeeping role of the gatekeepers with respect to the coverage of human rights violations.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Gatekeeping Role of the Press in Covering of Human Rights' Issues

Table 1: Human Rights' Issues and their Coverage

Human Rights Issues	The Times of India			The Indian Express		
	Front Page Frequency (Space in cm ²)	Inside Page Frequency (Space in cm ²)	Front & Inside Frequency (Space in cm ²)	Front Page Frequency (Space in cm ²)	Inside Page Frequency (Space in cm ²)	Front & Inside Frequency (Space in cm ²)
Abduction/kidnap	--	5 (411.25)	5 (411.25)	1 (60)	3 (162.75)	4 (222.75)
Farmers' rights	2 (77.7)	13 (2559.25)	15 (2636.95)	1 (246.5)	6 (839)	7 (1085.5)
Minorityrights	3 (144)	14 (1841.5)	17 (1985.5)	5 (816)	10 (1983.25)	15 (2799.25)
Atro. On protester	6 (286.9)	13 (2455.75)	19 (2742.65)	6 (947.5)	31 (5951.25)	37 (6898.75)
Bonded labour	--	--	--	1 (232)	1 (272)	2 (504)
Child abuse	--	2 (343)	2 (343)	1 (136)	2 (277.5)	3 (413.5)
Child labour	--	1 (74.25)	1 (74.25)	--	--	--
Child marriage	1 (128.65)	--	1 (128.65)	1 (112.5)	3 (764)	4 (876.5)
Atro. on dalits	5 (318.45)	10 (2110.75)	15 (2429.2)	3 (522)	6 (1465.25)	9 (1987.25)
Dowry death	--	1 (98)	1 (98)	--	1 (84.5)	1 (84.5)
Extortion	--	5 (610.25)	5 (610.25)	--	4 (527.25)	4 (527.25)
Displacement	--	--	--	--	4 (960.5)	4 (960.5)
Harassment	7 (461.25)	37 (4654.5)	44 (5115.75)	7 (1108.25)	25 (4927.55)	32 (6035.8)
Honour killing	1 (16)	2 (408.25)	3 (424.25)	--	1 (112)	1 (112)
Human trafficking	1 (25.65)	--	1 (25.65)	--	3 (702.5)	3 (702.5)
Organ trade	--	--	--	--	2 (148)	2 (148)
Malnt. of children	1 (84)	3 (505.5)	4 (589.5)	1 (96)	7 (1304.5)	8 (1400.5)
Scavenging	--	--	--	--	--	--
Militant violence	9 (546.12)	41 (5299.75)	50 (5845.87)	3 (454.25)	74 (14887.25)	77 (15341.5)
Atro. on tribals	1 (68)	1 (400)	2 (468)	--	4 (1212.75)	4 (1212.75)
Murder	10 (481.19)	42 (3921.95)	52 (4403.14)	3 (463.05)	39 (3953.45)	42 (4416.5)

Table 1: Contd.,						
Sedition	--	--	--	--	2 (791)	2 (791)
Punish oppressor	11 (1045.95)	64 (7577.95)	75 (8623.9)	7 (1114)	49 (6150.5)	56 (7264.5)
Rape	6 (468.2)	13 (1127.25)	19 (1595.45)	1 (42)	11 (1804.5)	12 (1846.5)
Religious violence	3 (340.5)	24 (4983.75)	27 (5324.25)	4 (625.75)	3 (474)	7 (1099.75)
Disabled rights	--	7 (1328.25)	7 (1328.25)	--	2 (596.2)	2 (596.2)
Rights of migrants	1 (165)	10 (1395.8)	11 (1560.8)	3 (389.1)	8 (1587.5)	11 (1976.6)
Rights of elderly	--	5 (627.25)	5 (627.25)	2 (392.25)	1 (161.5)	3 (553.75)
Prisoner rights	2 (53.75)	17 (2280.5)	19 (2334.25)	2 (188)	15 (2066)	17 (2254)
Rights of refugees	1 (18)	6 (887.5)	7 (905.5)	1 (76.5)	11 (4269.75)	12 (4346.25)
Sexual violence	6 (618.5)	11 (1549.2)	17 (2167.7)	--	10 (1158.3)	10 (1158.3)
St. spons. violence	13 (1248.1)	20 (2669)	33 (3917.1)	2 (256)	30 (7194.55)	32 (7450.55)
Suicide	--	11 (1143.75)	11 (1143.75)	--	8 (472.1)	8 (472.1)
Reproduct. rights	3 (130.5)	11 (2206.05)	14 (2336.55)	1 (189)	2 (268)	3 (457)
Total Coverage	93 (6726.41)	389 (53470.2)	482 (60196.61)	56 (8466.65)	378 (67529.15)	434 (75995.8)

Table-2 reveals that The Times of India covered highest number of stories (75 with a space of 8623.9 cm²) on punishment to oppressor, whereas, The Indian Express given prominence to violence (Naxal, militant, terrorist) by covering 77 stories with 15341.5 cm² of space. Further, on punishment to oppressor category, The Times of India covered 11(1045.95 cm²) on the front page and the remaining 64 (7577.95 cm²) on the inside pages. On violence, The Indian Express covered 3 stories with 454.25 cm² on the front page and 74 stories with 14887.25 cm² on the inside pages. News related to issues of murder/attempt to murder occupied second slot in the order of importance in the The Times of India. A total of 52 stories with a space of 4403.14 cm², of which 10 stories with 481.19 cm² appeared on the front page and 42 stories with a space of 3921.95 cm² appeared on the inside pages. Whereas, news stories related to punishment to oppressors acquired second slot in The Indian Express (56 stories with 7264.5 cm²); of which 7 (1114 cm²) stories appeared on front page and 49 (6150.5 cm²) found to be placed on inside pages. There were 50 stories with 5845.87 cm² of space provided to violence (Naxal, militant and terrorist) by the Times of India on third slot in order of importance, of which 9 stories with 546.12 cm² of space on the front page and the remaining 41 stories with 5299.75 cm² appeared on the inside pages; whereas The Indian Express covered 42 (4416.5 cm²) news stories of murder/attempt to murder under this slot, of which 3 (463.05 cm²) appeared on front page and 39 (3953.45 cm²) stories on inside pages.

The fourth on the line of importance given to stories on harassment/intimidation by The Times of India. There were 44 stories with 5115.75 cm² of space allocated to this kind of stories; of this 7 (461.25 cm²) stories on the front and the remaining 37 (4654.5 cm²) on inside pages. A total of 37 news stories with 6898.75 cm² appeared in The Indian Express under atrocities against protester; of which 6 (947.5 cm²) appeared on the front page and 31 (5951.25 cm²) on inside pages. State-sponsored violence got the fifth position on the line of importance given by both The Times of India as well as The Indian Express. 33 (3917.1 cm²) stories on the above category appeared in The Times of India, of which 13 (1248.1 cm²) covered on the front page and 20 (2669 cm²) appeared on inside pages; while The Indian Express had published 32 stories with 7450.55 cm², of which 2 stories with 256 cm² appeared on front page and 30 stories with the space of 7194.55 cm² published on inside pages. Stories related to religious violence acquired the sixth slot on the line of importance given to stories on human rights by The Times of India. The paper published a total of 27 stories with a space

of 5324.25 cm²; of which 3 stories with 340.5 cm² on the front page and 24 stories with 4983.75 cm² appeared on the inside pages; whereas The Indian Express preferred the stories related to rights of protesters in sixth slot and published 17 stories with 2254 cm²; of which 2 (188 cm²) appeared on front page and the remaining 15 (2066 cm²) stories appeared on inside pages. As regards the harassment/intimidation, 32 news stories with 6035.8 cm² appeared in The Indian Express, of which 7 stories with 1108.25 cm² appeared on the front page and the remaining 25 stories with 4927.55 cm² on inside pages.

The atrocities against protester, rape, and rights of prisoners acquired the seventh position in order of importance in The Times of India: the paper had covered 6 stories with a space of 286.9 cm² on the front page and 13 stories with 2455.75 cm² on the inside pages. As regards rights of prisoners, 2 stories with 53.75 cm² appeared on the front page and 17 stories with 2280.5 cm² on inside pages. As for rape, 6 stories with 468.2 cm² appeared on the front page and the remaining 13 stories with 1127.25 cm² appeared on inside pages during the study period. The Indian Express allotted the seventh slot to rights of minorities by publishing 15 stories with 2799.25 cm² of space; of which 5 stories with 816 cm² appeared on the front page and 10 stories with 1983.25 cm² appeared on inside pages. The eighth place in the order of importance given to rights of minorities and sexual violence against women by The Times of India. Sexual violence against women captured more space than the rights of minorities. On one hand, there were a total of 17 stories with 2167.7 cm² published in the newspaper under sexual violence against women category. Of which 6 stories with 618.5 cm² of space on the front page and the remaining 11 stories with 1549.2 cm² of space on the inside pages. Rights of minorities occupied 1985.5 cm² of space with 17 news stories; of which 3 stories with 144 cm² appeared on the front page and 14 stories with 1841.5 cm² on inside pages. While The Indian Express had given the eighth position to the stories related to rape and rights of refugees wherein the stories of rights of refugees got greater space than rape. Under, rights of refugees, total of 12 stories with 4346.25 cm² appeared; of which, one story with 76.5 cm² on the front page and the remaining 11 stories with 4269.75 cm² appeared on inside pages. Likewise, under rape a total of 12 stories with 1846.5 cm² appeared; of which one story with 42 cm² appeared on the front page and the remaining 11 stories with 1804.5 cm² on inside pages. Farmers' rights and atrocities against Dalits acquired a ninth position in The Times of India, of which farmers' rights got more space as compared to atrocities against Dalits. On farmers' rights, 2 stories with 77.7 cm² appeared on the front page and 13 stories with 2559.25 cm² appeared on inside pages. As regards atrocities against Dalits, 5 stories with 318.45 cm² appeared on the front page and rest of the 10 with 2110.75 cm² of space appeared on inside pages in The Times of India. The rights of migrant workers acquired a ninth position in The Indian Express with 11 stories (1976.6 cm²); of which 3 (389.1 cm²) appeared on the front page and the remaining 8 (1587.5 cm²) stories appeared on inside pages.

Women's reproductive rights acquired the tenth position in terms of the frequency of the coverage in The Times of India. The paper covered 14 stories with 2336.55 cm² on this specific category, of which 3 (130.5 cm²) stories appeared on the front page and 11 (2206.05 cm²) stories on its inside pages. While The Indian Express had allotted the tenth slot to sexual violence against women. All the 10 stories with 1158.3 cm² related to sexual violence against women appeared on the inside pages. Stories related to migrant workers and suicide have given an eleventh slot in the hierarchy with 11 stories each published by The Times of India. However, migrant workers acquired more space in terms of space and front page coverage. The Indian Express allotted the eleventh position to atrocities against Dalits; 3 stories with 522 cm² appeared on the front page and the remaining 6 stories with 1465.25 cm² of space appeared on inside pages under this category. Rights of disabled persons and rights of refugees simultaneously got a twelfth slot in The Times of India. Malnutrition of children and suicide acquired a twelfth position in The Indian Express. The thirteenth position in order of importance given to abduction/kidnapping, extortion/money laundering and rights of elderly people in The Times of India. However, in terms

of the space, more importance had been given to the rights of elderly people; but none of the above three categories published even a single story on front page. As regards The Indian Express, farmers' rights and religious violence found an equal number of stories got thirteenth slot in order of importance during the study period. On religious violence, the newspaper covered 4 stories with 625.75 cm² on its front page and 3 stories with 474 cm² on inside pages. Similarly, on farmers' rights, one story with 246.5 cm² of space was published on the front page and the remaining 6 stories with 839 cm² relegated to inside pages.

As regards malnutrition of children, The Times of India placed it on the fourteenth position: one story with 84 cm² on the front page and 3 stories with 505.5 cm² on the inside pages. Whereas, The Indian Express allotted the fourteenth slot in order of importance to abduction/kidnapping, child marriage/forced marriage, extortion/money laundering, displacement and atrocities against tribals. On abduction/kidnapping, one story with 60 cm² on the front page and 3 stories with 162.75 cm² published on the inside pages. The Indian Express had published a single story with 112.5 cm² on the front page and 3 stories with 764 cm² on inside pages under child marriage/forced marriage category. All the 4 stories with 527.25 cm² on extortion/money laundering were published on inside pages by The Indian Express. 4 stories with 960.5 cm² also appeared under displacement in its inside pages. The Times of India did not cover even a single story under displacement. In the same manner, atrocities against tribals found 4 stories with 1212.75 cm² of space on inside pages. The honor killing acquired the fifteenth position in order of importance by The Times of India in terms of frequency of coverage. A single story with 16 cm² of space published on the front page and 2 stories with 408.25 cm² appeared on inside pages. Rather, The Indian Express allocated the fifteenth slot to child abuse/molestation, human trafficking, rights of elderly people and women's reproductive rights. However, more prominence is given to human trafficking in terms of total space while the front-page coverage was slightly given more coverage to rights of elderly people as compared to other human rights issues in this specific slot. On child abuse/molestation, a single story with 136 cm² appeared on the front page and the remaining 2 stories with 277.5 cm² placed on inside pages. The paper did cover all the 3 stories with 702.5 cm² space on human trafficking on its inside pages. Similarly, the paper published 2 stories with 392.25 cm² related to the rights of elderly people on the front page and one story with 161.5 cm² of space on its inside pages. finally, on women's reproductive rights, the paper covered one story with 189 cm² of space on the front page and 2 stories with 268 cm² space on inside pages. The sixteenth slot in order of importance given to issues related to child abuse/molestation and atrocities against tribals by The Times of India. The Indian Express provided the sixteenth slot to the categories like bonded labor & forced labor, human organ trade, sedition and rights of disabled persons. Stories related to child labor/juvenile delinquency, child marriage/forced marriage, dowry death and human trafficking has given seventeenth position by The Times of India. The Indian Express did not give any space to the stories related to child labor/juvenile delinquency. All the stories related to dowry death and honor killing published on the inside pages of The Indian Express. On manual scavenging, not a single story had got published by both of the newspapers under study.

Framing of News on Human Rights Issues

Table 2: Selection of Frames

Type of Frame	The Times of India			The Indian Express		
	Front Page Frequency	Inside Page Frequency	Front & Inside Frequency	Front Page Frequency	Inside Page Frequency	Front & Inside Frequency
Media Referential	5	50	55	3	30	33
Media Trial	2	6	8	--	--	--

Oppressor	--	17	17	3	25	28
Pragmatic	6	47	53	5	55	60
Prognostic	--	34	34	2	32	34
Sensational	1	14	15	2	19	21
Victim	2	21	23	6	31	37
Total	16	189	205	21	193	214

The Table 2 reveal that the Times of India covered maximum 55 news stories, of which 5 on the front page and 50 on inside pages, with media referential frame. The Indian Express had 33 news stories with media referential frame; of which three stories published on the front page and the remaining 30 on its inside pages. Further, 53 news items of The Times of India contained pragmatic frames, of which 6 have appeared on the front page and 47 on its inside pages; whereas, The Indian Express published 60 stories with a pragmatic frame, of which 5 stories on the front page and 55 on inside pages. This indicates that The Indian Express had adopted a more practical approach towards covering human rights issues. The Indian Express presented a greater number of stories with victim frames (37 stories), whereas The Times of India given less importance (23 stories) to this category. The Indian Express presented 34 stories in prognostic frames, on which two items on the front page and the remaining 32 appeared on inside pages, while all the 34 stories with prognostic frame were published in the inside pages of The Times of India. The Indian Express had given appropriate space to oppressor frames and produced 28 stories, of which 3 on the front page and 25 on inside pages, while The Times of India published all the 17 news items with oppressor frame on inside pages. The Indian Express presented 21 stories with sensational frames, while The Times of India had covered 15 stories with this frames. The Times of India had 8 news items with media trial frames but The Indian Express did not cover any story this frame during the period under study.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the present study demonstrate the key role played by newspapers as gatekeepers in covering human rights' issues by choosing which stories and issues ought to be reported. It is astonishing to note that no special page is devoted to human rights issues in The Times of India but it has covered number of stories related to these issues. Whereas, The Indian Express published special stories on human rights issues periodically. The data extracted from tables and framing analysis point out that the newspapers do have given adequate attention to human rights issues. Though The Times of India covered more stories in terms of numbers, but The Indian Express had provided more space for human rights issues despite covering a lesser number of stories. As far as news frames were concerned, The Times of India had surprisingly given more stories to media referential frames as compared to The Indian Express. While oppressor and victim frames have more prevailed in The Indian Express in comparison to The Times of India. Pragmatic and prognostic frames were almost equally chosen by both of the newspapers. Sensational frames have also appeared in both of the selected newspapers which should be minimized by the papers to strengthen credibility among its readers. At the same time, The Indian Express seems to be giving more importance to human rights issues as compared to The Times of India. The findings of the study further revealed that The Times of India had adopted a commercially driven approach to cover news related to human rights, whereas, The Indian Express tried to expose the truth while reporting human rights issues. News about human rights is to be regarded as separate, and the reporters covering it need to have a general understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the people. Issues and problems related to human rights need deep focus, extensive research, elaborate interpretation, and understanding on the part of both journalists and readers. A dedicated team of reporters committed towards human rights will be of great help.

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